**USM Middle School WRITING GUIDELINES:**

When assigning writing, the English department would like to propose that all MS teachers use common language to communicate their expectations to students. Often as English teachers, we hear complaints from students when we ask them to adhere to certain conventions. If we were all using the same language and had a set of clear expectations that went along with that language, students would be less confused and would most likely become better communicators. Also, as teachers we need to try our best to model good writing and adhere to the conventions of good writing. Like it or not, we are judged by how we communicate to the public.

We think we can simplify and clarify by describing writing as falling into one of two categories: “**formal”** or “**informal”**. A piece’s **AUDIENCE** and **PURPOSE** would determine whether it should be classified as formal or informal.If acceptable to MS teachers, this would allow us to label any assignment as formal or informal and automatically communicate a set of expectations to students.Additionally, this helps students understand why some language and writing is not appropriate for some writing tasks.

**Informal writing is** personal writing, writing for yourself, writing that is not going to be shared with others, spoken language, notes, or language used during note-taking, reminders, memos, pre-writing, planning, and writing to friends.

**Formal writing is** any academic writing done for an assignment. Exceptions are notes, personal journal entries, or short answer test questions (if so desired by the teacher). Following the guidelines of formal writing is especially important if the writing is going to be shared with others, published, or put on public display, including online formats.

**NOTE:** When work is on display, whether physically or online, we must ask students to follow certain guidelines. Although, students use these technologies in their daily lives, when it is done as part of an academic class, we see this as an opportunity to reinforce the conventions that we teach at school. Our students need to be effective communicators. We need to remind and reinforce academic writing, not reinforce abbreviations and incorrect language that they will inherently absorb without our help. If you ask your students to write or respond online, we ask that teachers hold these responses to the same high standard that we hold all formal, academic writing.

**TIP from your friendly neighborhood English teachers:** Asking open-ended questions or specific questions that require elaboration and support may help students compose deeper, more thorough written responses. Also, students should always consider audience and be sure to proofread their responses, checking for conventions. Encourage students to give an example and/or explain exactly what they enjoyed, etc. when posting feedback to a journal, wiki, blog or other website.

**Formal writing must include developmentally appropriate:**

* complete sentences
* capital letters at the beginning of sentences and at the beginning of proper nouns
* end-marks (punctuation at the end of sentences)
* accurate spelling
* accurate grammar usage
* and must not use text message or IM abbreviations